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# Disability Special Emphasis Program

## October: National Disability Employment Awareness Month

Every October is the National Disability Employment Awareness Month in which we celebrate the accomplishments of men and women with disabilities. According to the Office of Disability Employment Policy, is a time to celebrate the many and varied contributions of America’s workers with disabilities.

This year 2015 marks the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first observance, and the theme is “*My Disability is One Part of Who I Am*” (English) or “*Mi discapacidad es una parte de quien soy*” (Spanish).



The Presidential Proclamation of this year stated that:

*Americans with disabilities make up almost one-fifth of our population, but are unemployed at a rate that is twice that of people without disabilities; and for women and minorities with disabilities, the rates are even higher. Despite all they contribute to our society, people with disabilities still face discrimination by employers, limited access to skills training, and, too often, unfairly low expectations. As a Nation, we must continue to promote inclusion in the workplace and to tear down the barriers that remain -- in hearts, in minds, and in policies -- to the security and prosperity that stable jobs provide and that all our people deserve. And we must actively foster a culture in which individuals are supported and accepted for who they are and in which it is okay to disclose one's disability without fear of discrimination... America is at its strongest when we harness the talents and celebrate the distinct gifts of all our people. This October, as we observe the 70th anniversary of National Disability Employment Awareness Month, let us pay tribute to all who fought for better laws, demanded better treatment, and overcame ignorance and indifference to make our Nation more perfect. In their honor, and for the betterment of generations of Americans to come, let us continue the work of removing obstacles to employment so every American has the chance to develop their skills and make their unique mark on the world we share. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/10/01/presidential-proclamation-national-disability-employment-awareness-month>*

**Please be aware of this special observance month and celebrate the hard work, commitment and accomplishments of all people with disabilities.**



## ***Reasonable Accommodation Request***

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NRCS is required to provide Reasonable Accommodation to people with disabilities. This accommodations are not only for employees but also for job applicants. According to the General Manual, Reasonable Accommodation is a change in the work environment or the application process that would enable a person with a disability to enjoy equal employment opportunities.

### **Reasonable Accommodation Procedures: GM 230 401.36**

1. The requests by an employee, or on the employee's behalf, for reasonable accommodation may be made orally or in writing to his or her immediate or first-line supervisor. The request should outline the kind of accommodation requested, if known.
2. If the employee has an obvious or previously documented medical condition that qualifies him or her as an individual with a disability, the accommodation request shall be considered immediately. If the employee does not have an obvious or previously documented medical condition that qualifies him or her as an individual with a disability, he or she may be required to provide sufficient documentation of his or her medical condition.
3. The employee seeking a reasonable accommodation or the receiver of the request must follow-up an oral request by one of the following: (1) Completing Form AD-1163, Confirmation of Request for Reasonable Accommodation. See General Manual (GM), Title 230, Part 401, Subpart E, Exhibits, Section 401.51. (2) Confirming the request in writing, including by e-mail. Although either the employee or the receiver of the request may document the request, the receiver is responsible for completing written documentation and sending a copy to the NRCS DEPM.
  - a. (i) An employee gives an applicant seeking a reasonable accommodation the Form AD-1163, Confirmation of Request for Reasonable Accommodation, from the personnel office where the applicant is submitting the application.
  - b. (ii) Although a written document is required for record-keeping purposes, Form AD-1163 shall be processed in accordance with timeframes outlined in these procedures. Accommodations needed repeatedly (e.g., sign language interpreter, reader, or personal assistant) do not require written confirmation. The initial or subsequent request should contain language describing the accommodation as "recurring and continuing" and appropriate notice must be given each time the accommodation is needed.
  - c. (iii) If a written or oral request is made to an NRCS employee who does not have the authority to provide the accommodation, the request shall be forwarded as soon as possible, but in no more than five days, to the appropriate NRCS official.
4. When the employee is determined to be a qualified individual with a disability and the requested accommodation does not cause undue hardship to the Agency, the accommodation shall be provided.
5. Because a reasonable accommodation allows the employee to perform the essential functions of the job satisfactorily, it is expected that the accommodation shall be provided within 30 business days of the request, unless documented extenuating circumstances prevent accommodation within this time period.
6. The process of providing reasonable accommodation must begin as soon as possible after the request for an accommodation is received.

For more information on Reasonable Accommodation go to:

GM 230 401 Subpart C – Reasonable Accommodation

## Accessible Gardens for People with Disabilities

by Michelle Catoni, DSEPM

With the changes in climate and the high cost of food, more people are becoming interested in agriculture. You can see in the public media that there has been a huge interest and necessity to produce food locally, not only on the farm level but also in our homes. Box gardens where residents can produce their own food are having a positive impact on people and communities with limited access to land or farms. In these gardens you can grow almost any kind of plant.

But... it caught my attention that the box gardens and plant beds were so low that gardeners have to bend over to reach the plants, making it them very difficult to maintain. Also some gardens may not have sufficient space between plant beds, further limiting access. This is a problem for people with disabilities (or the elderly) because these gardens are not accessible.

I did some research and found the following basic recommendations and measurements for raised garden beds for people with disabilities.

### Basic Measurements to build an accessible raised-bed garden:

#### Height

- Raise beds from soil level at 24"-36" from the ground.
- If you wish to plant tall plants like tomatoes, the ideal height should be 24".
- If you wish to work with your knees under the table, the height of the planter at soil level will be need to be about 34". This allows up to 12" soil depth and leaves 24" beneath the raised bed for knee space.
- See Figures 1 and 2.

#### Width

- More convenient with a 3' width.
- Seated gardeners will be able to reach the plants from any side of the raised beds.
- See Figure 3.

#### Pathways

- Pathways should be 4' wide on all sides. But it depends upon who is using the pathway.
- Use a textured surface for traction and orientation, and contrasting colors and textures.
- Paths should be level and smooth.
- Ramps and other grades should not exceed 5 percent.
- See Figure 3.



**Basic recommendations for Gardeners with Disabilities (always consult with your therapist or physician):**

### Visually Impaired Gardeners

1. Customize the garden to fit your needs.
2. Raised beds and containers are closer for locating, touching and smelling.
3. Try planting herbs or flowers with a nice fragrance. Also, use plants distinguishable by texture.
4. Hang up a wind chime to orient yourself to a specific part of the garden.
5. Add elements that appeal to all five senses. Color and variety.



### Wheelchair Gardeners

1. Customize the garden to fit your needs.
2. Use smaller lightweight garden tools.
3. Use gloves with sticky surface.
4. Choose the ideal height and width for raised beds.
5. Situate the garden or planters for maximum access.
6. Work to the side, rather than from a frontal position.
7. Store garden tools nearby.
8. Use low maintenance gardening techniques.



M.Catoni, DEPM

### Gardeners with disabilities

1. Customize the garden to fit your needs.
2. Think about enabling garden tools that are ergonomically designed.
3. Raise garden beds help people with physical restrictions and to avoid bending and stooping.
4. Provide tables that are wheelchair accessible where people can do potting and planting together.
5. Provide retractable hanging baskets that can be pulled up and down so they are within easy reach.
6. Use containers with wheels, which can be moved around easily to accessible positions and to catch the sunlight.
7. Have a water supply handy and place plants together according to their water needs.
8. Have an equipment storage area or shed nearby.

Remember, these are basic recommendations. Please, always consult with your therapist or physician before doing any kind of work.

Reference: [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au); [www.gardenforever.com](http://www.gardenforever.com); [www.learn.eartheasy.com](http://www.learn.eartheasy.com); [www.infinitec.org](http://www.infinitec.org)

## TED Talk: Embrace the Shake

*"In art school, Phil Hansen developed an unruly tremor in his hand that kept him from creating the pointillist drawings he loved. Hansen was devastated, floating without a sense of purpose. Until a neurologist made a simple suggestion: embrace this limitation ... and transcend it."*

I invite you to see this video and think about the importance of your attitude towards any challenge, especially towards a disability ... click the link below to view the video.

[https://www.ted.com/talks/phil\\_hansen\\_embrace\\_the\\_shake](https://www.ted.com/talks/phil_hansen_embrace_the_shake)

# Letters Soup GAME!!!

Find the following words:

- Employment    Disability    Month    Work    Vision
- October    DEPM    Hearing    Physical    Speech
- Caribbean    People    Learning    Conditions    Targeted

D	E	P	N	N	A	S	D	C	F	G	B	H	E
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For questions or concerns about the DSEP, please contact Michelle Catoni, Disability Special Emphasis Program Manager, at the NRCS San Sebastian Field Office at 787-896-3565 x.105 or [michelle.catoni@pr.usda.gov](mailto:michelle.catoni@pr.usda.gov).